



Kara no Kyoukai Volume 01

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That day, I chose to take the main street home. It was just a whim, and a very rare thing for me to do.

Walking woodenly along the building-lined street that I was tired of seeing day in and day out, someone came crashing down. It was a squishing sound that you should never hear. The person lying on the pavement, broken, had obviously died from falling off a building. A crimson color slowly seeped onto the concrete. The only features that remained were the dark black hair and the pale, thin, fragile-looking limbs.

And that featureless, crushed face.

The whole scene was surrounded by the old summer, and it reminded me of a pressed flower, flattened between the covers of a heavy tome.

Probably because the corpse, with its neck bent unnaturally, looked like a broken lily to me...

/ Overlooking View (Thanatos) -Fujoh Kirie-

/ 1

On a night at the beginning of August, Mikiya came by without any notice.

"Good evening. You look lazy as always, Shiki." The sudden visitor stands by the door as he gives a boring greeting with a smile.

"I passed an accident on my way here. A girl jumped from the top of a building: a suicide. Though I heard it's been happening a lot recently I never thought I'd see one myself. Here, freezer." He throws me a plastic bag from a convenience store as he unties his shoes by the door.

Inside are two strawberry Häagen-Dazs. I guess he means I should put them in the freezer before they melt. While I was slowly checking out the contents of the bag, Mikiya had finished taking off his shoes and was stepping across the threshold.

My house is a room in a mansion. If you go past the hallway — which, mind you, isn't even a meter long — you get to the room serving as both my bedroom and my living room. Staring at the back of Mikiya, who was stepping quickly into the room, I followed.

"Shiki. You skipped school again today, right? I don't care about your grades, but you won't be able to pass unless you attend at least the required days. Did you forget about our promise to go to college together?"

"Do you have the right to lecture me about school? I don't remember such a promise, and what's more, you've already dropped out of college."

"Uh, if you say 'rights', there aren't any rights for anybody, but..." Sounding sophisticated, Mikiya trailed off and looked for a seat. He tends to let out his true feelings when he's on the defensive; it's something I remembered just recently.

He landed himself in the middle of the room. I sat on the bed behind him, and spread myself out. The only thing I could see of Mikiya was his back, which was a bit small compared to the average guy. I look at it empty mindedly.

This young man named Kokuto Mikiya seems to be my friend from back in high school.

In the midst of youngsters nowadays — where so many fads appear one after another, gain speed, and finally dash out of control into disappearance — he was a

boringly "rare kind" that kept the image of a student: He doesn't dye his hair or let it grow long, He doesn't get a tan or wear accessories, He doesn't carry a cell phone or play around with women, His height is around 170cm or so, His kind-looking face is more on the cute side and his huge black glasses make that feature stand out even more. Even though he has graduated from high school, he dresses ordinarily. If he were to dress up a bit, he would likely catch a few eyes.

"Shiki, are you listening? I met your mother too. Shouldn't you show up at the Ryougi House at least once ? I heard that you haven't even contacted them since you got out of the hospital two months ago."

"No. Especially when there's no need."

"Hey, even if there's no need you should be happy just to be together, they're your family after all."

I paused a bit before replying. "I don't know. It can't be helped 'cause I can't really think of it as real. We'll just feel more distant even if we see each other. I still feel weird talking to you, so there's no way I'll be able to keep up a conversation with those strangers."

"Geez, things will never settle if you keep it this way. It'll be like this your whole life if you don't open up your heart to them. It's not right for parents and children to live so close together and yet not even meet each other."

I frown at those reproachful words.

Not right, he says. What exactly is "not right"? There's nothing illegal in what's happening between me and my parents. It's just that the child was involved in a traffic accident and lost all its memories. We are proven to be family by law and by blood, so I'd assume there's nothing wrong with the current situation.

Mikiya always worries about how other people feel. Although I think that is just pointless.

Ryougi Shiki has been my friend since high school. Our school was a famous private high school which taught a lot of students who went to a good college.

When I went to see if I was admitted, the name Ryougi Shiki stood out so much that it was stuck in my head. Ironically, we ended up being in the same class. Since then, I became one of the few friends Shiki had.

Our school did not have uniforms so everyone expressed themselves by how they dressed. Within these people, Shiki stood out. This is because Shiki always wears a kimono. Always.

The simple flowing form of the kimono fit Shiki's sloping shoulders so much it made the classroom feel like a samurai-style house just by having Shiki walk through it. It was not just the looks of Shiki, either. No unnecessary movements. Shiki rarely talked, except when in class. I think this alone explains what kind of a person Shiki is.

Shiki's figure is almost too perfect. Hair, beautiful as silk, cut with scissors like it was a bother and left just like that. It is a short cut just long enough to hide the ears, which suits Shiki so much that many students mistake Shiki's sex. Shiki looks so handsome that she looks like a female to men and is mistaken as a male by women. The word beautiful doesn't quite fit her, though. It's more like she looks dignified.

But much more than Shiki's looks, what captivated me the most were her eyes. Those eyes have a sharp yet calm look, and her thin brows intensify it. With her eyes, she gazed upon things invisible to us, and that is what made the person named Ryougi Shiki so special to me.

Yes.

Until that thing happened to Shiki.

"Jumping down."

"Er— Sorry, didn't hear what you said."

"Suicide by jumping off something. Would that be considered an accident, Mikiya?" He gathered his thoughts after that meaningless muttering and seriously started thinking about the question.

"Hm, I'm sure it's an accident, but you're right. I wonder what that is. So long as it's the person's will to do so, the blame is only on that person. But falling from a high place could be considered an accident."

"Then it's not a murder, nor is it an accidental death. It's really ambiguous, if you say it this way. Though they should have picked a way that wouldn't trouble others if they were going to kill themselves."

"Shiki, it's not right to talk ill of the dead," Mikiya said flatly. His words are so utterly predictable.

"Kokuto, I hate your common sense talk." Naturally, my response gets a bit harsh, but Mikiya does not seem upset by it.

"Wow, it's been a long time since you called me that."

"Really?"

Mikiya nods.

He can be called two ways: Kokuto and Mikiya. I don't like the sound of Kokuto, although I don't exactly know why. In the small silence that formed during my

pondering, Mikiya clapped his hand as if he remembered something.

"Oh, speaking of uncommon things, my sister Azaka saw it."

"Saw what?"

"That thing. The girl at the Fujiyoh building, the one they say is flying in the air. You said you saw it once too."
"

Oh, I remember now. The ghost story that started around three weeks ago. As the story has it, there's an expensive mansion in the office district called Fujiyoh building. At night, a human-like form can be seen floating above the building. The fact that not only I, but Azaka as well, saw it must mean the thing is real.

After being in a coma for two years from that traffic accident, I was able to see things that were not supposed to be there. As Touko would put it, I am not seeing them but rather "observing" them. In other words, it seems that I am able to perceive things at a higher level with my eyes and brain, but I don't care about all the reasons or explanations behind this.

"The thing at the Fujiyoh building, I've seen it not only once but many times. Though I haven't been around there for a while, so I don't know if it can still be observed or not."

Mikiya responded, "I see. I go by there a lot, but I never saw the ghost."

"You can't see it 'cause you're wearing glasses."

"I don't think glasses matter," Mikiya frowns. His reaction was so warm and pure. That's probably why it's harder for him to see those kinds of things. Even so, boring incidents keep on happening like people falling and flying.

I didn't understand the meaning behind the thought, so I said a question out loud, "Mikiya, do you know why people fly?"

Mikiya shrugs.

"I don't know why they fly or fall," he said, "because I've never done any of them, not even once."

So matter-of-factly, and so coolly said.

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On the night at the end of August, I decided to take a walk.

The air is a bit cold for the end of a summer. The last train has already left and the town is quiet.

It's cold, quiet and old, just like a dead city. Even the passing people seem cold and artificial like photos. It reminded me of an incurable disease.

... Disease, illness, sickening.

Everything, the dim houses, the illuminated convenience stores... everything seemed as if it would crumble if it let its guard down.

In it all, the moon shines through the night.

In this world where everything is lifeless, it seems like the moon is the only thing alive, and it hurts my eyes.

... That's what I mean by sickening

When I left the house, I put on a black leather jacket over my light blue kimono.

The kimono gets trapped inside the jacket and burns my body.

But it's still not hot... no, rather...

For me, it was never cold to begin with.

---- Even though it's midnight, if you walk, you see some people.

A man hurrying down the street with his face down.

A young man pondering in front of a vending machine

Many people hanging out in front of the convenience store.

I tried to figure out what reasons they had for being there, but I never did figure it out, being just an outsider.

First of all, there was no meaning behind me walking by myself out late at night.

I'm just repeating what I used to do before.

... Two years ago.

I, Ryougi Shiki, was about to head up to my second year in high school when I got in an accident. I was carried straight to the hospital.

I heard that my body didn't get any serious wounds, but the damage was concentrated on my head.

Since then, I was in a coma.

Maybe because my body was uninjured, the hospital kept me alive, and my meaningless body also tried to live on.

And finally, about two months ago, Ryougi Shiki recovered.

I guess the doctors were shocked - it was as if a corpse had come back to life. I see, that tells me how much they expected my recovery.

And myself too, I was shocked for another reason.

My memory before my waking up is a bit weird.

To put it simply, I cannot trust the memories I have.

This is different from memory disorder, or rather what people usually call amnesia.

According to Tohko, memory is composed of four systems that the brain operates: writing, saving, replaying, and recognizing.

"Writing" is to take what you see and to write it into your brain as information.

"Saving" is to keep that information stored.

"Replaying" is to recall the stored information. In other words, remembering.

"Recognizing" is to confirm that the information recalled is the same as the event that actually occurred.

If one cannot perform any one of these processes, one has a memory disorder. Of course, depending on which system is dysfunctional, the case of memory disorder will vary.

But in my case, all these functions are working properly. I can't really feel my previous memories as my own, but the function of "recognizing" is working

properly as I can tell that the memory is indeed the same as what I've experienced before.

But still, I could not be confident about my previous self. I could not feel that I am who I was.

Even if I do remember my memory as Ryougi Shiki, I can only recognize the memory as someone else's. Even though there's no doubt that I'm Ryougi Shiki.

The two years of emptiness has reduced Ryougi Shiki into nothing.

Unlike what society thinks, it has caused what's inside of me to crumble into nothing. My memory and the personality I should have had... the connection was utterly destroyed.

With that being the case, my memory became nothing but an image.

But because of that image, I am able to act like I used to. I can communicate with the people I knew and my parents as the Ryougi Shiki they knew, but without any concern for my real feelings.

To be honest, that troubles me so much that I can almost not stand the pain.

..... It's just mimicry I'm not living at all.

Just like a newborn baby. I don't know anything and I haven't experienced anything. But the memory of the past eighteen years has made me into a complete human.

I already have the emotions people originally learn from experiencing many events as my memory. But I have not actually experienced them. But even if I wanted to experience them, I already know about them. There is no amazement, no feeling of being alive. ... Just like being unable to be surprised by a magic trick which you already know.

And just like that, I continue to act like I used to without feeling that I'm alive.

The reason is simple.

Because if I do so, I might be able to return to my previous self.

Because if I act like that, I might figure out the reason why I take these walks late at night.

... Oh, I see.

Then you could say that I am in love with my previous self.

Looking up after noticing that I have walked a long way, I find out that I am in the office district.

Buildings of the same height are standing side-by-side along the road in a well-mannered fashion. The surface of the buildings is filled with glass windows, and they are only reflecting the moonlight right now.

In the darkness, the large mirrors created by the buildings are reflecting each others' figures hazily.

It's a quiet night tonight.

The group of buildings by the main street is like a world of shadows in which monsters roam around.

Deep in it, there is a shadow taller than the rest. That building, like a twenty-story-high ladder, looked like a tower reaching for the moon.

The name of the tower is Fujiyoh.

There are no lights on in the mansion called the Fujiyoh building. The residents are probably all asleep. Probably because it's already almost two in the morning.

At that instant, an uninteresting shadow caught my eyes.

A silhouette of a girl floats into my vision. Not metaphorically, the girl is literally floating.

There is no wind.

The coldness in the air is abnormal for summer.

The bone in my nape creaks from the cold.

Of course, it's just my imagination.

"I see. So you're here today too."

I don't like it, but nothing can be done about what I can see.

And like that, the girl we were talking about was flying as if she were lying on the moon.

/ Overlooking View

-----The image is that of a dragonfly. Busily flying.

A butterfly came to follow, but I didn't slow down.
The butterfly eventually could not keep up and fell as it
was about to go out of my vision.

It falls in an arc.

The falling motion like that of a snake; it looked like a
broken lily.

That image is a really sad one.

Even though we cannot go together, I should have at
least stayed by its side a bit longer.

But that is impossible. Because, since I do not have my
feet on the ground, I do not even have the freedom to
stand and stop.

Since I could hear someone talking, I decide to get up.

... My eyelids are pretty heavy. This is proof that I still
need two more hours of sleep.

As I think to myself that I am petty for still trying to wake up in that state, my will has won over my sleepiness.

... Really, I'm troubled at how simple I am.

I think I finished up writing the drawing plan after working on it all night, and went to sleep in Tohko-san's room.

When I raised myself from the sofa, I was indeed in the office. In the summer sunlight, Shiki and Tohko-san seem to be talking about something.

Shiki is leaning on a wall while standing up, and Tohko-san is sitting cross-legged on a chair.

"Morning, Kokuto"

The look on Tohko-san's face, which is more like a glare, is normal. ... Seeing that she has her glasses off, I guess she was talking with Shiki about "those" kinds of things.

On the note of being usual, she is dressed like the usual too.

With her hair short and her neck showing, Tohko-san looks like a secretary. But since her glare looks so scary, I bet she won't ever get that kind of a position.

The black thin pants and the seemingly new white shirt suit her.

"Sorry, I guess I fell asleep."

I try to make up an excuse.

"Don't explain the obvious. I can tell."

Cutting me off like that, she takes her cigarette to her mouth.

"If you're awake, go make something to drink. It should be a good rehabilitation."

".....?"

She must mean reformation when she says rehabilitation.

I don't know why she would say that to me, but since Tohko-san is always like that, I decide not to question her

.

"Do you want anything, Shiki?"

"I'm fine. I'm going to bed soon."

Saying so, Shiki does indeed seem to be lacking sleep.

Maybe she took a walk last night after I left.

Next to the room which is Tohko-san's room and the office is a room like a kitchen.

The sink has three faucets in a row - maybe it used to be a lab or something. Two of those have metal wires wrapped around them and are not for use. The reason for that is unknown to me; under closer examination, it makes me feel slightly the way boxers feel when they are trying to lose weight, but they don't get many thanks because they start to feel violent.

Well, I turn the coffee maker on to make coffee for the two of us. I do so very efficiently. I'm already a master at brewing coffee. But it's not like I'm working here to make tea or coffee...

It's been half a year since I got employed here.

No, the word "employed" is not right because this place is not even a functional workplace.

To come here prepared even for that, it is probably because I fell in love with that person's work.

After Shiki stopped time at the age of seventeen, I graduated high school and entered college without a purpose.

It was a promise made with Shiki to enter that college.

Even if Shiki had little hope of recovery, I still wanted to keep that promise.

But nothing was there for me after that. After I became a college student, I just lived through the days.

While I was living aimlessly like that, I went to an exhibit I was invited to, and ended up finding a doll.

It was a doll made so delicately, it seemed to be at the limits of a man's skills. It was like a frozen human, yet at the same time it was clear that it was simply a human-shaped mannequin which would never move.

But it was just too beautiful...

A human about to start moving any second now. But a doll which does not have any life to begin with. A place where only things with life can reach, yet a place where no human can reach...

I fell in love with that ambivalence.

Probably because everything about its existence was exactly like Shiki back then.

It was unknown where the doll came from.

The pamphlet did not even mention its existence.

When I desperately looked for the source, I found out that it was made by a volunteer and the crafter was one surrounded by much rumor in the industry.

The crafter - whose name is Aozaki Tohko - is a hermit , to put it simply. I guess her true job is doll-making, but it seems she designs buildings too.

She will do anything that involves making something, but never accepts any requests. She will always go to someone and show them what she will make; she would start making it once she has received the payment up front.

She is either an eminent virtuoso, or just a big weirdo.

I got more and more curious, and I knew I shouldn't have, but I found out the address of this weirdo (A claim which I can now assert with the utmost confidence...)

It was away from the city and it was an ambiguous address not in the residential district or the industrial district.

It wasn't even a house.

It was an abandoned building.

And it's not just a normal abandoned building. Its construction was started a few years ago, but came to a halt halfway through when the previously prolific economy began to fail. Its shape as a building is present, but the interior is totally unfurnished, and the walls and the floors are completely bare.

It would have been six stories high upon completion, but there's nothing above the fourth floor. Nowadays, it's more efficient to start building from the top floor, but I guess it was still using the old construction method back then. Since the construction was stopped halfway, the half-done fifth floor became like the rooftop.

Even though the building is surrounded by a tall concrete wall, it's easy to get into. It's a miracle some kids didn't make a secret base out of it.

Anyway, I guess Aozaki Tohko bought this abandoned building.

The kitchen-like room I'm in right now is on the fourth floor. The second and the third floors are like Tohko-san's workspace, so we usually talk on the fourth floor.

...Let's get back on topic.

After that, I got to know Tohko-san and I ended up working here, quitting the college I had just gotten into.

Incredibly, I get paid here.

As Tohko-san puts it, there are two types of people with one of two attributes: the one to make and the one to search, the one to use and the one to destroy.

She told me frankly that I had no hope as the one to make, but she still hired me. She said that I had the ability as the one to search or whatnot.

"You're slow, Kokuto."

...I hear that from the next room.

Looking, I notice that the coffee maker is already filled with the black liquid.

"I guess the one yesterday makes eight. People should start to notice the similarities by now."

Putting out her cigarette, Tohko-san suddenly says.

She must be talking about the recent recurrent suicides of female high-school students, throwing themselves off high buildings.

I think so because there's nothing else she would want to talk about, this summer being free as it is of any issues such as water shortages.

"Huh? Wasn't it six?"

"There were more while you were dozing off. It started in June, and it's averaging about three per month. Maybe there'll be one more within the next three days."

Tohko-san says something sickening. Taking a look at the calendar, August will come to an end in three days. Three more days...?

Something about that caught my attention, but it faded away quickly.

"But I heard they are all unrelated. The girls who committed suicide are all supposedly from different schools with no connection to each other. It might be that the police are hiding the facts, though."

"You're not trusting people? That's unlike you."

Tohko-san grins.

...With her glasses off, she can be infinitely mean.

"Because not one will has been televised. Six, no, eight people. If there're that many, at least one should have left behind a will. But if the police have not said anything about it, you'd think they are hiding them."

"I'm saying that's the relation. Or I should say "the connection point". Out of the eight, more than half are seen jumping off by themselves, by several people, but they are unable to find anything wrong with their private lives. It's not like they were doing drugs or affiliated with a weird religion. It's definitely a case of suicide where they felt uneasy about themselves and selfishly took their own lives. That's probably why the cops aren't taking a big interest in this matter."

"Are you saying that there was no will from the beginning?"

After I say so doubtfully, Tohko-san nods but says that she can't be too sure.

But could that be possible?

There's an inconsistency somewhere, I think as I take the coffee mug and taste the bitterness of the liquid inside.

Why would there be no will? If there is no will, people usually wouldn't kill themselves.

A will is an attachment to the real world. When a person who does not like to die is forced to die, the will is what they leave behind as a reason for their death.

A suicide without a will.

To have no need to write a will means they have nothing to leave to this world, and are willing to disappear without a trace. That would be the perfect suicide. I think a perfect suicide would be one without a will and even the death itself would not be found out.

But committing suicide by jumping off a building is not a perfect suicide. To die in a way to catch people's attention seems in itself a will.

Then what?

Maybe it's for a different reason... like someone stole their will? No, then that would not be a suicide.

Then what?

There's only one logical answer I can think of.

Like it sounds, maybe those were just accidents.

The girls had no intention of dying from the beginning. Then there would be no reason to write a will. It's like getting involved in an unfortunate accident while going outside for a bit.

Just like what Shiki said last night.

...But I could not come up with a reason why they would jump off a building when they were just going out for a bit.

"The suicides will end at eight. There won't be any more for a while."

Shiki comes into the conversation as if to interrupt my raging thoughts.

Even though Shiki seems to be uninterested in this subject.

"You can tell?"

I had to ask.

Shiki nods while looking far away.

"I went and looked. There were eight flying about."

The well-shaped lips let out those words.

"Oh, so there were that many at that building. You knew from the beginning how many there were, Shiki?"

"Yeah, I finished it off but I think those girls will stay there for a while, even though I don't like that idea. Hey, Tohko. Do all the people end up that way when they can fly a bit like that?"

"I don't know. You can't say for sure since everyone's different but in the past, of those who have attempted to fly with just human powers, none have succeeded. The words "fly" and "fall" are tied together. But the more you're hooked to flying, the more you forget about that fact. As a result, you end up trying to reach the skies even after you die. Not falling to the ground, but falling toward the sky."

Shiki frowns at Tohko-san's response.

Shiki's angry... but at what?

"Sorry, but I don't quite follow the conversation."

"Hmm? We're talking about the ghost of the Fujiyoh building. Although I can't say for sure if it's just an image or a real thing unless I take a look at it. I was thinking of going to take a look at it if I had the time, but if Shiki's already killed it, there's no way for me to check now."

... I see. As I expected, they were talking about "those" kinds of things.

When Shiki and Tohko-san without her glasses talk together, they usually talk about these occult-like things.

"You heard the story that Shiki saw the girl floating at the Fujiyoh building, right? That story had more to it and it seems there's a human-like figure flying around those floating girls. We were thinking that since they won't stray from the Fujiyoh building, maybe that place was like a net or something."

I'm troubled at how complex and weird the story has become.

As if Tohko-san can tell my confusion, she sums up the whole thing.

"In other words, there's one floating human at the Fujiyoh building and around it are the girls who died by suicide. These girls are probably something like ghosts. That's pretty much it."

I nod.

I understand the story but I guess I'm hearing it after it's all over.

Judging from the way Shiki talked, it seems the ghost thing was already taken care of.

It's been two month since I let these two meet. I'm starting to become the one to hear about the results when it comes to these kinds of tales.

As a normal human being different from these two, I'd like to stay away from those stories. On the other hand, since it doesn't suit me to be ignored, I think this neutral stance I'm holding right now is perfect.

I guess people call this good news within bad news.

".....?"

Shiki gets angrier and starts to glare at me.

Have I done something to make Shiki mad?

"Huh? But Shiki saw the ghosts there at the beginning of July, right? Then there were only four ghosts back then?"

I say the obvious just to confirm, but Shiki says no.

"Eight. There were eight from the beginning. Like I told you, there won't be any more after eight. In their case, the order is the opposite."

"Then you're saying you saw eight ghosts from the start? Like that one clairvoyant girl?"

"No way. I'm normal. It's just that the air there is abnormal. Let's see... it feels weird. Like hot and cold water right next to each other."

Tohko-san follows-up Shiki's ambiguous words.

"So in other words, time there is not working properly. It's not like there's only one way for time to pass by. The time it takes for something to rot away is unfairly different for everything. Then, it should follow that a human individual and its memory take different times to disappear. When someone dies, does that person's memory disappear? It doesn't, right? As long as there are observers, ones to remember, nothing disappears instantly, but gradually fades away."

"Memories, or rather, "records". If an observer happens to be in the environment around that person,

people like those girls will be preserved by their memories and walk the earth as "illusions" even after their deaths. This is part of the phenomenon which we know as "ghosts". The only ones who see these projections are the ones that share the memories with these ghosts, namely their parents and friends. Shiki, however, is an exception.

"Of course, the passage of time does affect these "records", but at the top of that building, it seems to occur at a much slower rate. The girls' memories from when they were alive have not caught up to their true state yet.

"As a result, the memories stay alive. What can be seen there are the actions and the existences of those girls whose time happens to be passing by slowly."

Then, Tohko-san lights another cigarette.

So she is saying that when something goes away, as long as I remember it, it has not disappeared. Thus, the very act of me remembering it causes it to be alive. So if it's alive, it can be seen?

That's just like hallucination... No, Tohko-san probably used the word "illusion" because it is defined as something that isn't real.

"I don't care about all that explanation - there's no danger in that. The problem is *her*. I know I got that thing good, but if there's a main body somewhere else, we'll just end up repeating this over and over again. I'm tired of being Mikiya's bodyguard."

"I feel the same way. I'll take care of Fujoh Kirie. You can just take Kokuto home. There's about five more hours until he's off work. If you're going to sleep, you can use the floor there."

The place Tohko-san points at is a place that has not been cleaned for the past year and is like a dirty furnace.

Of course, Shiki ignores her.

"So, what was that anyway?"

Shiki glares at Tohko-san.

The wizard with a cigarette in her mouth thinks to herself and walks over to the window.

From there, she looks outside.

There is no lighting in this room. We only get the light from outside and it's hard to tell if its morning or afternoon in here.

In contrast, the view outside the window is clearly mid-day. You could almost see the blazing-hot white sunlight.

Tohko-san stares at the summer scenery for a while.

"Before, you could classify her as flying."

The smoke she blows out mixes in with the white sunlight.

I stare at her back as she looks outside... She's like a mirage in all this white.

"Kokuto, what do you think a view from a high place reminds you of?"

This sudden question pulls me back into reality.

I haven't really been at a high place since I went to the Tokyo Tower as a child. I don't really remember what I thought about it then. The only thing I know is that I

tried so hard to spot the place where I lived, but ended up not being able to find it.

"Maybe, something small?"

"That's too shrewd of a remark, Kokuto."

A cold response comes back. Well, I was a bit doubtful about my remark myself. I pull myself together and try to think of something else.

"Let's see. There isn't much that it reminds me of, but I do think it's beautiful. A view from a high place is overwhelming."

Probably because this response was more from my heart, Tohko-san nods in agreement.

While still staring outside, Tohko-san continues to talk.

"The scenery you see is magnificent: even an ordinarily boring landscape would look beautiful. But that's not the impulse you feel when you look down onto the world you live in. The overlooking view only gives you one impulse..."

Saying the word "impulse", Tohko-san cuts off her sentence.

Impulse is not something that comes from within you like feelings, but rather something that attacks you from the outside. Even if the one attacked by it doesn't want it.

Something like violence that attacks you without warning, that is what we call an "impulse".

Then what is the violence that is brought by an overlooking view?

"That is being 'far'. A vision too big creates a vivid separation between you and the world. People can only feel safe around things close to them. Even if one has the most detailed map and knows exactly where they are, it's only information, right?

"For us, the world is only something we can feel ourselves. The boundaries between cities, countries, and the world can only be unconsciously recognized by our brains, and we ourselves cannot feel them unless we actually go to those. And in reality, there is nothing wrong with that way of recognition.

“But if the vision is too large, discrepancy occurs. The ten meter area around you, that you actually feel, and the ten kilometer area that you are looking down on. They are both the world you live in, yet you feel the first to be more real.

“See? There's already an inconsistency. It's more correct for you to recognize the larger world you see as the world you live in rather than the small space around you. But no matter how hard you try, you cannot feel that you are living on this big world.

“The reason being, what feels more real is always something that is around you. Your reasoning as your knowledge and your experience as your feelings crash against each other and eventually, one will lose and confusion will start.

“...How small the city is from up here. I can't even imagine my house was down there. Was that park shaped that way? I didn't even know that was there. This is like a town I don't know about. It feels like I've come to a place far away.

“... A high perspective brings these kinds of thoughts. Even though the person is still standing on a part of that city they're looking down on..."

A high place is a place far away. That is true, distance-wise. But Tohko-san must mean the mental aspect of it.

Two places apart horizontally and vertically. The only difference between the two is if you can or can't look down on the other place.

"So you mean it's not good to keep your vision at a high place?"

"If you go too far. In the ancient times, the sky was considered to be another world. To fly meant going to the other world. You will be drowned in another will if you do not protect yourself by means of technology. Just like it sounds, you go crazy."

"Well, if you do have the right protection on your recognition, you won't be affected that much. It won't be a problem if you have a firm place to stand on. You'll be back to normal when you get back on the ground."

... Now that she mentions it, when I was looking down on the school ground from the rooftop once, I suddenly wondered what would happen if I jumped down.

Of course, it was just a joke.

I had no intention of actually doing so, but why did I get that thought when it obviously leads to death?

Tohko-san says there are individual differences, but I think it's common for people to think about falling when at high places.

"Does it mean your mind goes crazy for just an instant ?"

Tohko-san laughs after I blurt out my question.

"Everyone dreams about the taboo, Kokuto. Humans have the ability to gain pleasure from imagining things they cannot do. But... yeah, that's pretty close. The important thing is that the thought only comes at a specific place - at that place itself. Well, I guess that's pretty obvious. To speak in your case, I think your mind isn't crazy, but rather numb."

"Tohko, you've been talking for too long."

Shiki interrupts as if to say she can't stand it anymore. Come to think of it, we might have strayed off the main topic.

"It's not long at all. If you're talking in terms of constructing a discussion topic, we're only on the second part."

"I only want to hear the end. I don't want to hear you guys talk."

"Shiki..."

It's mean, but I guess she also has a point.

Shiki continues to complain, ignoring me.

"And, you say there's a problem with views from high places. Then what is a normal view? Even when we're walking, we have a higher view than the ground."

In contrast to Shiki's attitude of trying to find holes, I thought the argument did have a point.

A person's eyes are certainly at a higher level than the ground. Then that would mean our view is somewhat overlooking the world.

Tohko-san nods at Shiki's words. I guess she's just going straight to the conclusion.

"But the ground you think is flat is actually slightly curved. Even taking that into account, you can't say our normal vision has an overlooking view of things.

"A vision is not what your eyes see, but it's an image that your brain comprehends. Our vision is protected by common sense, so we never feel our height to be high, and it's even considered normal. There's no notion that it's high.

"But on the other hand, everyone is living with a vision that is overlooking. Not a physical vision, but I mean our mental vision. Everyone is different, but a larger mind will try to go higher. But still, it will never leave its box.

"Humans are made to live in a box, and they can only survive in the box. Humans cannot have the views of the Gods.

"However, when one's mental vision surpasses a certain boundary, one becomes not so much a God as a monster. Hypnos, that is, "illusion", turns into Thanatos - real death."

As she says so, Tohko-san herself is overlooking the world. She is looking down at the earth with her feet set on the ground. It seems significant, somehow.

And then, I remember the dream I had

The butterfly fell at the end.

Maybe she could have flown more gracefully if she had not tried to follow me.

Yes, if she fluttered as if to float, she should have been able to fly longer.

But since the butterfly knew about flying, it could not stand the lightness of its floating body.

That's why it flew instead of floating.

Thinking that much, I question myself if I was that poetic.

Tohko-san, by the window, throws her cigarette away.

"The flicker at the Fujiyoh building might be the world she was seeing. I can guess that the difference in the air Shiki felt was the boundary between the outside world

and the inside of the box. That is a discontinuity that only a human mind can perceive."

With Tohko-san's talk finished, Shiki finally seemed to relax.

Shiki lets out a breath and looks around.

"Discontinuity, huh? I wonder which side was the warm side and which side was the cold side for her."

In contrast to the serious tone, Shiki acts like it doesn't matter.

Tohko-san also acts like she doesn't care.

"Of course, the opposite of you."

And answered so.

→ / 3

-----*The bone in my nape creaks.*

Is the cold that's making me shiver coming from outside or inside my body?

Leaving what can't be distinguished aside, Shiki keeps walking.

There's no sign of human activity at the Fujiyoh building.

It's two in the morning. Only the white light illuminates the hallway of the mansion. The cream-colored walls are bathed in light and I can see to the end of the hallway. The light which steals away the darkness feels eerily artificial and unnatural.

Passing by the card checker at the entrance, I enter the elevator.

It's empty inside. A mirror is bolted to the rear panel of the elevator for the convenience of the passenger. Watching me with lazy eyes from the inside of the mirror is someone wearing a black leather jacket over a light blue kimono. Eyes that look like they care about nothing.

Shiki glances at the figure in the mirror, and pushes the button that says "R". With a small start-up sound, the world around Shiki rises. The motor-driven box will reach the top floor in a matter of seconds.

It is a closed-off room for the time being. Nothing occurring outside right now concerns Shiki, and it is impossible to be concerned with the outside world. That feeling seeps into the supposedly empty mind. This small box is the only world I'm supposed to feel right now.

The door opens without a sound. What's outside is a totally different world, a world of darkness.

After arriving at the annex, containing only the door leading to the rooftop, the elevator leaves Shiki and descends back towards the first floor. There are no lights, and the surroundings are painfully dark.

Heading across the small room, Shiki pushes open the door to the rooftop.

... The deep darkness becomes faint.

The outline of the city fills my vision.

The rooftop of the Fujiyoh building is a plain one. The floor is made of flat concrete, and there is a fence that surrounds the perimeter of the roof. A solitary water tower stands atop the annex, but there is nothing else particularly significant.

The rooftop itself is a plain one, but the view from it is out of this world.

The view of the night town from this building that is at least ten stories higher than its surroundings feels perhaps more lonely than beautiful. It feels like you're on top of a tall ladder looking down onto the world. The depths of this sea view, however, are certainly beautiful. The electric lights dotted here and there give off a warm luminescence like that of an anglerfish.

If my view right now is that of the whole world, then the world right now is indeed asleep, as if eternally, but fortunately it's only temporary. The silence tightens my heart more than any coldness, and it is rather painful...

The coldness of the night sky stands out just much as the coldness below. If the town is the deep sea, then the sky is just pure darkness. In the darkness, stars glitter like jewels. The

moon is a void in this darkness - a large hole in a big black canvas known as the night sky. So that thing is really not a mirror of the sun, but rather a view of "the other side"... That's what I heard at the house of the Ryougi. According to them, the moon is a gate to another world.

Since ancient times, the moon has carried magic, women, and death. And with that moon behind it, a human form is floating...

... With eight girls flying around it.

The white figure in the night sky is that of a woman. She wears a fancy white garment that one might mistake for a dress, and has long black hair reaching down to her waist. Her arms and legs are slender, and they make this woman look even more beautiful.

The thin brow and the cold eyes are beautiful. I can estimate she's in her twenties. Although it's doubtful that you can fit an age meant for a living being onto something like a ghost.

But the white woman is not abstract like a ghost. She is really there. The girls aimlessly flocking around the woman seem to match the definition of "ghost" better than her; their lazy floating makes them seem more like they are swimming than flying. Even their figures and forms are abstract, as they flicker into transparency from time to time.

What's above Shiki right now are the white woman and the girls floating as if to protect her.

The whole sight is not horrifying. No, this is more like.

..

"Hmph, this is indeed demonic."

Shiki sneers.

This woman's beauty is no longer that of a human's. Her black hair is especially luxurious, each strand with a silken sheen and texture. If the wind were stronger, her figure with hair flowing about it would have been a profoundly beautiful image.

"Then I shall have to kill you"

Perhaps hearing Shiki's murmur, the woman looks down. The woman is four meters above this rooftop which is already over forty meters high. The woman's and Shiki's gazes meet.

There are no words to speak, nor is there a language to communicate with.

Shiki reaches a hand into her leather jacket and draws a knife. A small sword by any other name, with a blade perhaps some eighteen centimeters long.

Shiki's consciousness is filled by the killing intent of the gaze piercing down from above her.

The white figure sways. Her arm flows and a slender finger points at Shiki. That slender, fragile arm does not remind Shiki of *white*.

"... More like bones, or a lily"

In the windless night, her voice hung in the air for a long time.

---- The will put into the fingertip is the intent to kill.

The white fingertip points at Shiki.

Shiki's head sways. The thin body steps once to regain its balance. But only once.

"-----"

The woman overhead hesitated a bit from that.

The *suggestion* that "you can fly" is not working on this person.

Her power can give someone the impression that "they were flying" - more of a brainwashing than a "suggestion" by any normal definition. There is no way to fight it, and as a result, one actually tries to fly, or conversely runs away from the fear of being able to fly. But Shiki was able to withstand it with just a small daze.

"-----"

The woman wonders if the contact was too weak, and decides to use *suggestion* again.

But this time, stronger. Not a weak impression like "You can fly" but she orders firmly: "You have to fly!"

But before that, Shiki looks at the woman.

One on each of her legs, one on her back, and one point on her left chest. The cutting section named death can be certainly seen. The one on her chest would be a good one to aim for. That would be an instant kill. Whether this woman is an illusion or something else, as long as it's alive, even if it were a god, I'll kill it.

Bringing the knife to bear in a firm reverse grip, Shiki glares at the enemy in the sky.

The impulse assails Shiki once more.

...I can fly. I can fly. I liked the sky from before. I was flying yesterday too. I could probably fly higher today. Freely. Feeling peaceful. Laughing. I have to go quickly...

Where? To the sky? Free? ... That's...

Escape from reality. Yearn for the sky. Reaction to gravity. No feet on ground. Flight under unconsciousness.

*Let's go, let's go, let's go, let's go, let's go, let's go-----
----- GO!*

"You've got to be kidding me."

Saying that, Shiki raises the empty left hand.

The suggestion does not work anymore. Shiki is not even fazed.

"I don't have that kind of admiration for the sky. I don't feel alive, so I don't know the pain of living. To be honest, I don't care about you at all."

...A murmur more like singing.

Shiki does not feel any restraint, joy or sorrow in life.

That's why Shiki is not attracted to the liberation from pain.

"But I don't like you keeping him. I got him first, so I'm taking him back."

Shiki's left hand grabs the empty air and pulls back.

As if being pulled by the left hand, the woman and the girls are pulled toward Shiki like fish being reeled in with a net.

"-----!"

The woman's expression changes. She puts more resolve into her will and pounds it against Shiki.

If she could communicate with Shiki, she would have screamed

"Fall!"

Ignoring the curse, Shiki responds in an icy tone.

"You fall."

The knife drives into the chest of the woman as she is forced downwards. As simply and swiftly as slicing through a fruit, and with such precision that even the woman feels a brief glimpse of admiration.

There is no blood.

The woman, unable to move from the shock of the knife transfixing her chest, convulses just once.

Shiki casually throws the corpse over the tall fence, into the depths of the dark city.

The woman tumbles past the bounds of the rooftop and falls without a sound. Her dark, silken hair does not

flutter, even during the fall, and fades into the night as her white robes are lost to the wind.

Like a white flower sinking deep into the ocean.

Shiki leaves the rooftop.

Above, the floating girls still remain...

/ 4

I wake up after having a knife stabbed through my chest. The impact was tremendous. That person must have been really strong to pierce someone's chest that easily. That said, it was not a violent excess of power. It did not do anything unnecessary, and slipped straight between the bones and the muscle as if they were nothing. What a sense of unity!

The feeling of death that runs through my body. I hear the sound of my heart being pierced and ripped. The "feeling" of it hurt me more than the pain itself, because that sensation was a fear and pleasure incomparable to anything else.

The chill running through my spine is mind-boggling, and my whole body is trembling. There exists uneasiness, loneliness, and the will to live, and I cried without a sound.

Not because of fear or pain.

It's because this unfamiliar feeling of death was there... Even for me, who every night wishes to be alive come sunrise.

I will never be able to escape this feeling

Since I have fallen in love with this feeling...

I hear the door open. The clock shows the time to be two in the afternoon, and it feels as if the sun is blazing through the closed window. It's not yet time for the examination, so maybe it's a visitor.

I have my own hospital room and there is no one else in here. What's here is the bright sunlight, curtains that never flutter in the wind, and this bed.

"Excuse me, Are you Fujoh Kirie?"

It seems the visitor is a woman. Greeting me with a husky voice, she comes near me without sitting down or anything. It seems she's looking down at me. Her stare feels cold.

...This person is a scary person. She will probably bring about my destruction.

But I actually feel happy inside, since it's been many years since I've had a visitor. I cannot bear to turn anyone away, even if the one who comes visiting was Death himself to finish me off.

"You are my enemy, right?"

The woman nods.

I try to focus and somehow see this visitor.

...It may be because of the strong sunlight, but I can only see her silhouette. She is not wearing a jacket, but her pressed, wrinkle-free suit makes her look like a teacher and causes me to relax somewhat. Nonetheless, her orange tie is rather flashy for her white shirt, so I have to take some points off for that.

"Do you know that person, or are you that person?"

"No, I'm an acquaintance of both the one who attacked you and the one you attacked. We, you included, made contact with the weirdest people. We must be pretty unlucky."

Saying that, the woman takes out something from her pocket and puts it right back.

"I forgot you can't smoke in here. In addition, it seems your lungs are bad. The smoke would do you nothing but harm."

She sounds regretful. I guess it was a cigarette box she took out. I've never even touched one before, but I wanted to see this person smoke. Probably... no, surely it would suit her well. Like a pair of lizard-skin pants on a showcase mannequin.

"It's not just your lungs that are bad. That must be the reason, but there are lots of tumors all over your body. Starting with sarcoma, it's worse inside. It seems that hair of yours is the only thing normal. But it's amazing how much strength you have left. A normal person would have died before it got this bad. ... How many years has it been, Fujoh Kirie?"

She is probably asking about my hospitalization, but I cannot answer her.

"I don't know. I stopped keeping track."

Because it's meaningless. Because I won't be getting out of here until I die.

The woman nods and says, "I see."

I don't like her tone, as it contains no sympathy or dislike. The only thing I get from people is sympathy, but this person is not willing to give me even that.

"Is the place Shiki cut all right? I heard Shiki cut you around the heart area, near the main artery... I would assume it was in your bicuspid valve."

She says an amazing thing with a normal tone. I let out a smile as a testament to her weirdness.

"What a strange person. I wouldn't be able to talk to you like this if my heart had been cut."

"Of course. That was just for confirmation."

I see. With that question she confirmed if I was the woman stabbed by that person who I couldn't classify as Japanese-styled or Western-styled.

"But the effect will come in time, Shiki's eyes are strong . Even if that thing was your second existence, the destruction will reach you in time. I wanted to ask you a few things before that... which is why I came here."

Second existence... She must mean that other me.

"I haven't seen you actually floating. Can you tell me what that was?"

"I don't know either. The only view I can see is this view out of this window.

"But maybe that was bad.

"I've been looking down at the world from here. The trees showing the colors of the four seasons, people coming to the hospital in turns.

"They cannot hear me even if I talk, and I cannot reach them no matter how far I stretch out my hands. I have been suffering all this time inside this room. I have been loathing this view for a long time. Isn't that what you would call curseing?"

"I see, it must be your Fujoh blood. Your bloodline is that of an old pure family. It seems they were specialized in prayers, but I see that their true powers were in curses. The name 'Fujoh' might come from the word 'impure'"

Bloodline.

My family. But that came to an end a few years ago. Soon after I was hospitalized, my parents and my brother died in an accident. Since then, a friend of my father has been paying for my medical expenses.

"A curse is not something that is woven unconsciously. What did you wish for?"

...I don't know myself. Even she wouldn't know.

"...Have you ever longed for the outside world for a long time? For so many years that you lose touch with reality? I hated, despised, and feared the outside world. I was overlooking it all the time. After a while, my eyes became weird. I was in the sky above that garden, and was overlooking the world below. It was a feeling like my eyes were flying around while my body and mind were still here. But since I can't move from here, all I can do is to overlook the area around here."

"You must have imprinted the surrounding scenery into your mind. If that's the case, you should be able to think that you can see it from all directions... You started to lose your vision around that time too?"

I'm surprised. She knows I'm on the verge of losing my vision.

I nod.

"That's right. The world turned white and in the end, nothing was there. At first, I thought everything turned into darkness, but that was wrong."

Everything disappeared, or at least everything that could be seen.

But I have no problem with that, because my eyes are already flying around. I can only see the scenery around this hospital, and I can't get out of here anyway.

"Nothing changed, nothing..."

Then, I cough. It's been a long time since I've talked this much, so my throat is burning.

"I see. So your mind was up in the sky. But then... why are you alive? If that ghost at the Fujiyoh building was your mind, you should have been killed by Shiki."

Yes, I am wondering the same thing.

That person... I guess the name is Shiki... How was that person able to cut me?

That floating me cannot touch anything. In return, I cannot be touched by anything, but that person killed me as if I had a real body.

"Answer me. The you at the Fujiyoh building, was that really Fujoh Kirie?"

"The me at the Fujiyoh building isn't me. Myself looking at the sky and myself in the sky, 'that me' gave up on me and flew away. I have been left behind even by myself."

The woman gasps. For the first time, she showed her emotion.

"So it's not that your personality split up. There was someone that gave you, who had one container, a second container. I see, you controlled two bodies with one mind . This is indeed nothing like before."

Now that she says so, that might have been the case.

I gave up on myself and was looking down on the world. But neither one of us could put our feet on the ground, and just ended up floating around. Since I am

rejected by the world outside this window, there is no way for me to go out there no matter how much I wish for it.

It must mean that we were connected in the end.

"That makes sense. But why weren't you happy with just imagining the outside world? I don't think there was a need to let those girls fall."

Those girls...? Oh, I see, the girls I was jealous of. They were unfortunate. But I did not do anything, because the girls fell on their own.

"The you at the Fujiyoh building was more like a will. You used that, huh? Those girls were able to fly from the beginning, right? Even if it was just an image in their head, or if they really had the power to fly. People flying in their sleep isn't rare, but it never gets to be a problem. Why? Because they only do so in their sleep and they never even think about flying when they are awake. Since they are unconscious, they have no evil will when they are flying.

"Those girls were special even in that case. We're not talking Peter Pan, but it's easier to fly when you're small. Maybe one or two might have actually floated, but most of them should have floated only in their dreams.

"But you made them think about it. You gave them the impression they had while they were dreaming when they were awake.

"As a result, they found out they could fly. Yes, they can fly... but only unconsciously. Flight with only human power is difficult. Even I cannot fly without a broom. The chance of flight under consciousness is about thirty percent. The girls tried to fly as usual, and fell as they were supposed to."

Yes, they were flying around me. I thought they could be my friends. But all they did was float around me like fishes without noticing me.

It was shortly after that I found out they had no consciousness. I just thought they would notice me if they had consciousness. That was the only reason, so why...

"Are you cold? You're trembling."

The woman's voice is cold like plastic.

I embrace myself as the chill does not go away.

"Let me ask you one more thing. Why did you admire the sky? You hated the outside world."

That's probably because...

"There is no end to the sky. I thought there would be a world I wouldn't hate if I could go as far as I wanted, if I could fly as far as I wanted."

The voice asks me if I found that world.

My chill does not stop. I tremble as if someone's shaking me, and my eyes are getting hotter.

I nod.

"...Every night, I feared I wouldn't be able to wake up the next day, I was scared I wouldn't live until tomorrow. I knew I wouldn't have the strength to wake up if I fell asleep.

"The days like a tightrope were only filled with fear of death. But because of that, I could feel that I was alive.

"I could only smell death every day, but to live, only that smell was reliable.

"Since I am nothing but a discarded shell, I can only feel alive when I am facing death."

That's right. That is why I like death more than life.

To fly anywhere, to go to anywhere I want...

"You took my boy as a companion to death?"

"No. At that time, I didn't know. I was attached to life and I wanted to fly while being alive. I should have been able to do so with him."

"You and Shiki are similar. You guys have a bit of salvation in that you guys both chose Kokuto. It's not a bad thing to search for the feeling of being alive in someone else."

Kokuto. I see, so that Shiki person came to take him back.

I guess my savior was also my death. I have no regret in that though.

"That person is really childish. He is always so straight. That's why he should be able to fly to anywhere he wants if he tries.

"... I wanted for him to take me."

My eyes are hot. I don't get it, but I'm probably crying.

Not because I'm sad... If I could really go somewhere with him, how much happiness would that have been? It's something that wouldn't come true, because it's a dream that shouldn't come true, that's why it's so beautiful that it makes me cry. That is the only dream I've had in the past few years.

"But Kokuto has no interest in the sky. The more one wants the sky, the farther they are from it, huh? How ironic."

"You're right. I have heard that humans have many things they don't need. I was only able to float. I could not fly, and all I managed was to stay floating."

The burning in my eyes disappeared. Probably, this will never again happen in the future.

What's controlling me right now is only this chill inside of me.

"Sorry to be a bother. This is the last question, but what will you do now? I can heal that wound Shiki gave you."

Without answering, I shake my head. It seems the woman frowned a bit.

"I see..."

"There are two ways to escape. Escape without purpose, and escape with a purpose. You call the former floating and the latter flight.

"You are the one to decide which one your overlooking view was. But if you choose one out of guilt, that's wrong. You shouldn't choose the path ahead of you based on the sins you carry, but rather, you should carry the sins on the path you choose."

Then the woman leaves. The woman has not told me her name, but I know there was no need to.

... She must have known what I would choose from the beginning. Because I could not fly, and all I could do was to float.

Since I'm weak, I cannot do as she said. That's why I cannot overcome this temptation. The flash of light I felt when I was stabbed in my heart. The overwhelming torrent of death and the beat of life. I always thought I had nothing, but there is still that simple thing left in me.

What's there is death.

This fear that sends a chill down my spine. I have to feel the most death I can to feel the happiness of life. For everything in my life I have ignored until now. But it probably would be impossible to die like I did that night. I probably cannot hope for such a striking end. That death pierced me like lightning, like a needle, like a sword. That's why I will try to come as close to that as possible. I don't have any idea right now but I still have a few days to think about it. And I've already decided on the method. I don't think I even need to say this, but I think my end should be a long fall from a place overlooking the earth.

/ Overlooking View

The sun has set and we leave Tohko-san's abandoned building. Shiki's apartment is in the area but my place is twenty minutes away from here by train. Tiredness shows in Shiki, who is walking a bit shakily, but nonetheless stays by my side.

"Do you think suicide is right, Mikiya?"

Shiki suddenly asks me that out of the blue. That downcast expression looks a bit touching.

"Hmm, I don't know. Let's say I get this virus that will kill everybody in Tokyo just by me staying alive. If everyone would be saved if I die, then I'd probably kill myself."

"What is that? That's so unlikely that it's not even a what-if story."

"Let me finish, I think I'd do that because I'm weak.

"I'm going to kill myself because I don't have the courage to keep on living and turn all of Tokyo into my

enemy. That's easier, right? Courage for an instant and courage that needs to continue throughout your life. You know which one is harder.

"It's an extreme argument, but I think death is running away, no matter what kind of determination is behind it. But there are times when the concerned person wants to run away. I can't deny it or refute it, because I'm a weak person as well."

Hmm, but this seems like I'm saying it's all right for someone to do so because I'd do so too. Self-sacrifice in that case is probably the right thing to do, and that action would be called heroic. But that's wrong. It's foolish to choose death no matter how noble or right it is. No matter how wrong or low it is, we have to keep on living to make right our wrongs.

We have to live on and accept the end of the things we've caused. That is something that takes a lot of courage. I don't think I could do that myself, and it sounds too cocky, so I decide not to say it.

"...Well, anyways... I think it's just different for everyone."

I end rather vaguely and Shiki looks at me doubtfully.

"But you're different."

Shiki says so as if seeing inside my mind. Whilst initially cold-sounding, the words feel warm somehow. It's a bit embarrassing, so I walk on for a while in silence. The clamor of the main street is getting closer. Sounds, bright lights, engine sounds. Flooding waves of people and the many sounds they make. If we pass the department stores, we'll be able to see the station right ahead.

Then, Shiki stops.

"Mikiya, come over to my place tonight."

"Huh? Why, all of a sudden?"

Shiki grabs me, saying that it doesn't matter.

It is indeed easier to stay at Shiki's place since it's nearby, but I don't feel like doing so, on moral grounds.

"It's fine. You don't have anything in your room either. It's boring even if I do go. Or are you telling me there's something I have to do there?"

I know there's no such thing. I said so knowing that, so there shouldn't be anything for Shiki to say back... or at least I think so. But Shiki looks at me as if I'm the cause of the problem.

"Strawberry."

"Huh?"

"Two strawberry Häagen-Dazs. They're still there from when you bought them. Finish those things off, man."

"...I guess I did buy those."

Yes I did. They were something I bought because of how hot it is while walking to Shiki's place. Then again, it's almost September after all, so I wonder why I bothered...

Well, I don't care about small things. I guess my only choice is to obey Shiki. But just obeying is a bit irritating, so I decide to strike back a little.

Shiki has a vulnerable point where, when I say this, Shiki gets mad but can't say anything back.

Even though it is a wish from the bottom of my heart,
Shiki still has yet to take my advice.

"All right, I'll spend the night. But Shiki..."

Shiki looks at me as I advise with a straight face.

"You shouldn't talk like that. You're a girl, you know."

Shiki looks away, angrily.

Overlooking View / Finish

Epilogue

That day, I chose to take the main street home. It was just a whim, and a very rare thing for me to do.

Walking woodenly along the building street that I was tired of seeing day in and day out, someone came crashing down. It was a squishing sound that you should never hear. The person lying on the pavement, broken, had obviously died from falling off a building. A crimson color slowly seeped onto the concrete. The only features that remained were the dark black hair and the pale, thin, fragile looking limbs.

And that featureless, crushed face.

The whole scene was surrounded by the old summer, and it reminded me of a pressed flower, flattened between the covers of a heavy tome.

I knew who it was. *Hypnos* returned after all by turning into *Thanatos*. I ignore the rapidly-growing swarm of bystanders and continue walking. Azaka catches up to me.

"Tohko-san. She committed suicide by jumping off that building."

"Yeah, I guess so," I answer vaguely.

To be honest, I had no interest. No matter what the will of the person is, a suicide will be treated as a suicide. Her last will can be summed up with one word, not "flight" or "floating", but by the word "fall". What's there is only nothingness, and there's no way anyone can have an interest in that.

"I heard there was a lot of that last year, but is it still occurring a lot? I don't get what goes on in these peoples' minds. Do you know, Tohko-san?"

"Yeah,"

I again answer vaguely while gazing up at the sky, as if looking at an image not there.

"There's no reason for suicide. It's just that she wasn't able to fly today."